

‘Songes of the Frere and the Nunne’: an unrecorded amorous carol in a Cambridge incunable

In a masterly study published in the *Review of English Studies* in 1981, P.J. Croft reconstructed the original context and early history of four late fifteenth-century English lyrics, collectively known as the Bradshaw Carols.¹ Carol 3, a ribald set of macaronic verses detailing the seduction of a nun by a friar ‘lusty proper and yong’, has been until now the unique manuscript witness to a genre of ‘merie song’ that, according to sixteenth-century sources, had a wide circulation. This article presents a newly discovered witness to the genre and explores the context in which it was recorded.

Croft demonstrated that the small, horizontally bisected paper bifolium on which the Bradshaw carols survive had for centuries served as two of the twenty sheets pasted together to form the laminated boards underneath the vellum covers of the binding on Cambridge, King’s College, MS 35.² Furthermore, he surmised that these fugitive scraps, now kept with the papers of Henry Bradshaw (1831-1886) in Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 7350, must have been removed from the binding by Bradshaw, a Fellow of King’s since 1853.³ Characteristically alert to their textual interest, University Librarian Bradshaw had put them among his papers; his sudden death led to their being preserved with his archive in the University Library rather than with the parent manuscript, a thirteenth-century English Psalter, in King’s.

The Psalter had been presented to the college in 1658 by Fellow Samuel Thoms, and must have been rebound at the time of its presentation using waste materials then available in the college. These included the school exercises of a young pupil named Richard Greene (documented 1611 and 1613) and, perhaps by accident, the four carols, all lightly glued together to create the boards for the binding. Carols 1 and 2 (copied by Croft’s Scribe A) are important additional witness to the works of the Canterbury Franciscan James Ryman (fl. 1492), whose lyrics are otherwise known only in one manuscript (Cambridge, UL, Ee.I.12).⁴ Carol 3, written in an accomplished *anglicana* by Croft’s Scribe B, is a slightly later addition, and marks a distinct shift in tone. It is constructed around a thread of musical imagery and liturgical allusions, and interspersed with a near blasphemous Latin burden,

¹ P.J. Croft, ‘The “Friar of Order Gray” and the Nun’, *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. 32 (1981), 1-16; Croft was Fellow and Librarian of King’s College, Cambridge from 1975 to 1984. The carols are housed in MS Add. 7350, formerly Box 2 but now Box 1, item 1; for editions see R.H. Robbins, ‘The Bradshaw Carols’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 81 (1966), 308-10 and R.L. Greene, *The Early English Carols*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1977), nos. 60.1, 289.1, 461.1, and 601.1.

² Croft, ‘The “Friar of Order Gray” and the Nun’, 9-14; M.R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts other than Oriental in the Library of King’s College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1895), 55-57.

³ For an overview of Bradshaw’s investigative methods, which might well have encompassed delaminating the boards of this binding, see R. Beadle, *Henry Bradshaw and the Foundations of Codicology*, The Sandars Lectures 2015 (Cambridge, 2017), especially Chapter 2.

⁴ For an edition of Ryman’s work see J. Zupitza, ‘Die Gedichte des Franziskaners Jacob Ryman’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 89 (1892), 167-338; on Ryman’s work, the manuscript, and the Bradshaw fragments, see now K. Reichl, ‘James Ryman’s Lyrics and the Ryman Manuscript: A Reappraisal’, in *Bookmarks from the Past: Studies in Early English Language and Literature in honour of Helmut Gneuss*, L. Kornexl and U. Lenker (eds.) (Frankfurt and Oxford, 2003), 195-227.

Inducas, inducas in temptacionibus.⁵ Summarized by Croft as ‘an audacious anti-clerical satire whose simple tale of seduction becomes a parody of the sung liturgy, wherein the friar’s lesson is answered by the nun’s canticle’, it is a pointed and humorous riposte to the pious verses that precede it. Carol 4, written in a less formal hand of the early sixteenth century, lacks any of the learned wit of Carol 3 and is a resolutely vernacular and vulgar romp through the theme of ‘maydens’ and their desire for ‘podyngs’.⁶ The presence of these carols in this collegiate binding led Croft to suggest that that the ‘original “friar-and-nun” carol was composed and written down at Cambridge towards the end of the fifteenth century in the scholarly and religious foundation of Henry VI’.⁷

Carol 3 was accorded special attention by Croft as the only surviving manuscript example of the genre, and more recently, the editors of the *New Index of Middle English Verse* also listed the Cambridge fragments as the unique manuscript witness.⁸ But sixteenth-century sources show how widespread it once was. In his amplified version of the *Apophthegmata* of Erasmus, Nicholas Udall (1504-1556) glossed his translation of *Fesceninus* as ‘ragmans rewe’ with the comment: ‘There was in *Campania* a toune called Fescenium ... In this toune was first inuented the ioylitee of minstrelsie, and singyng merie songes and rimes, for makyng laughter and sporte at marriages, euen like as is now vsed, to syng songes of the Frere and Nunne, with other semblable merie iestes, at weddynges, and other feastynges. And these songes or rimes (because their originall beginnyng issued out of *Fescenium*) wer called in Latin *Fescennina carmina* ... Which I doe here translate (according to our Englishe prouerbe) a ragmans rewe, or, a bible. For so dooe we call a long ieste, that railleth on any

⁵ Croft, ‘The “Friar of Order Gray” and the Nun’, pp. 15-16 gives an accurate edition of this carol in which the use of musical imagery is fully evident for the first time.

⁶ *Middle English Dictionary*: ‘poding (n.) (a) *Cook*. A kind of sausage; the neck of an animal filled with stuffing; a filling or stuffing; also, tripe; ?also, haggis; also *fig*’. On the two poems see J. Boffey and A.S.G Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London, 2005) (henceforth *NIMEV*), nos. 3543.55 (Carol 3) and 1344.5 (Carol 4), and the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse* (henceforth *DIMEV*), nos. 5593 (Carol 3) and 2248 (Carol 4): <http://www.dimev.net/index.html>

⁷ Croft, ‘The “Friar of Order Gray” and the Nun’, p. 15. F.J. Furnivall wrote to Bradshaw at least twice to encourage him to send copies of the carols for publication, even offering him the chance to publish anonymously (Cambridge, UL, MS Add. 8916/A71/58, letter dated 13 May 1871, mentioning ‘those 2 poems from the binding of the King’s MS’; Cambridge, UL, MS Add. 8916/A74/123, letter dated 6 November 1874: ‘Will you let me have copies of those two *free* [my emphasis] poems of your Coll. Libr. which used to be in one of your Drawers? I’m going to print a few later ones with which they’d go, & should like to see ‘em in type. (I shouldn’t mention your name)’. Note that Furnivall had recently edited, as a separate fascicule, the ‘Loose and Humorous Songs’ in the seventeenth-century manuscript of English verse on which Bishop Thomas Percy had partly based his *Reliques of English Poetry* (1765) (*Bishop Percy’s Folio Manuscript*, edited by John W. Hales and Frederick J. Furnivall, 3 vols. (London, 1867-1868), vol. 3, part 4). Despite Bradshaw noting in his letterbook for 7 November: ‘Send King’s MS Curiosity to the printer’ (Cambridge, UL, MS Add. 2592(5)/1078, fol. 77v), the ‘free’ subject matter of the two poems must have made him wary of publication. (I am grateful to Richard Beadle for these references).

⁸ *NIMEV* 3543.55.

persone by name, or toucheth a bodies honestee somewhat nere'.⁹ Croft also noted that the existence of this genre made sense of a puzzling allusion in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, IV.1, where Petruccio sings a 'snatch from a lost ballad' ('It was the Friar of Orders gray / As he forth walked on his way'), no doubt readily recognisable to Shakespeare's audience and intended to prompt a round of raucous laughter. Moreover, as both Robbins and Croft pointed out, a single trace of this oral tradition survives in print, in the *Christmas Carols Newly Imprynted* published by Richard Kele between 1542 and 1546. This collection has itself survived in only one copy, now in the Huntington Library. The Kele verses represent a much simplified working of the theme, entirely devoid of learned allusions, and with Latin confined solely to the repeated burden, *Inducas / In temptationibus*.¹⁰

Put simply, what appears to have been a widely enjoyed and familiar tradition of bawdy songs about the stock characters of the Friar and the Nun, seems to have come down to us in a single bifolium of binding waste (as Bradshaw Carol 3) and in a vanishingly rare mid-sixteenth-century printed edition. However, we can now add one further witness, itself an almost equally ephemeral survival. It is written on the flyleaf of a Bible that was printed in Naples in 1476 and imported to England in the late fifteenth century; it has been in the Old Library at Queens' College, Cambridge since at least 1827 and probably much earlier.

Queens' College, C.4.11 is a copy of the Latin Vulgate, with prefatory letters between Thomas Taqui and Biagio Romero, printed in Naples by Mathias Moravus in 1476.¹¹ It must have arrived in England soon after printing, as the dentate pen-flourishing added by hand to two of the dark pink major initials is typical of English limners' work (second leaf, printed signature *ai*, for the prologue of St Jerome (*Ep* 53, to Paulinus), and fol. t7r, for the Psalms; in addition, there are undecorated initials in dark pink for book divisions, in red for prologues, introductory texts and chapters, and red paraph marks for printed running titles and rubrics). The Bodleian Library copy of this edition was also in the hands of an English reader in the late fifteenth century, the gift of Lady Margaret Capell (daughter of

⁹*Apophthegmata* IV.34; quotation taken from *The Apophthegmes of Erasmus translated into English by Nicholas Udall, literally reprinted from the scarce edition of 1564* (Boston, 1877), 274; Udall selected, translated, glossed and amplified parts of Erasmus's text. In her study of Udall's drama *Ralph Roister Doister* (c. 1550-53), Carla Mazzio helpfully glosses 'bible' in this context as 'babble', abbreviated from 'bybbel bable' (C. Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia, 2009), 64).

¹⁰ This carol, 'The nunne walked on her prayere' (*DIMEV*, no. 5426; edited at Robbins, 'The Bradshaw Carols', 308, n.8), is part of the second collection that makes up the *Christmas Carols Newly Imprynted*, reproduced in facsimile from the Huntington copy by E. Bliss Reed, *Christmas Carols Printed in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), no. [19].

¹¹ISTC ib00545000. Printed on paper, Folio, 333 x 232 mm, 454 fols., with a nineteenth-century binding of polished calf over pasteboards: see T.H. Horne, *A Catalogue of the Library of the College of St. Margaret and St. Bernard, commonly called Queens' College*, 2 vols. (London, 1827), I, 13; F.G. Plaistowe, *Early Printed Books to the Year 1500 in the Library of Queens' College, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1910), no. 23; A.E. Andriolo and S. Reynolds, *Illuminated Manuscripts and Incunabula in Cambridge: Part V: Incunabula. Books Printed in Italy before 1501* (Turnhout and London, 2017), no. 149. I have been unable to identify it in the Queen's College Donors Book (<https://issuu.com/03776/docs/qunsdonors?pageNumber=2>). For further details of this Naples edition see M. Fava and G. Bresciano, *La Stampa a Napoli nel XV secolo*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1912), I, 59-63 and II, no. 110.

Sir Thomas Arundell) to Roger Philpot, Fellow of Winchester College (fl. 1497-1501).¹² In the Queens' copy, there are several annotations in English hands of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the most substantial of which is a set of verses in English with a Latin burden. Headed *Inducas in temptacionibus*, the text has been copied and carefully set out on the front flyleaf in an early sixteenth-century cursive hand. Although it has been heavily scored through, the text is easily recoverable. There are no notable dialectal features and very minor use of contractions (signalled here by italics). The presence of bracketing at the end perhaps suggests that the final two lines are to be repeated to round off the song:

Inducas in temptacionibus

The Nonne layd hyr downe to slepe

Inducas

And the Freer at hyr fete

In temptacionibus

The Freer toke the Nonne by the toe

Inducas

And said that he wold further goe

In temptacionibus

The Freer toke the Nonne by the knee

Inducas

I am not farre from the place where I shuld be

In temptacionibus

The Freer toke the Nonne by the thyghe

Inducas

And sayd good sporte was very nyghe .}

In temptacionibus .}

¹² Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. M.2.2, inscription probably in Philpot's hand (fol. 2z7v): *Istum librum habemus ex dono matrone mee Margarete Capell, uxoris Willelmi Capell, Armigeri, filie Thome Arundell militis*: <http://incunables.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/record/B-254>.

This hitherto unrecorded ‘vulgarization’ – to use Croft’s term – of the Friar and Nun topos, is analogous to but entirely independent of the text printed by Richard Kele in the 1540s, and lacks the more or less regular metre of both the Kele and Bradshaw versions. In distinction to the unifying liturgical and musicological imagery of Bradshaw Carol 3, this joyfully anti-clerical, vernacular riff on the theme has a narrative structure that is, so to speak, entirely corporeal, moving from toe, to knee, to thigh. As with both other surviving versions, the Latin burden – with its inversion of the Pater Noster’s ‘lead us not into temptation’ – gives the frisson of a near blasphemous proclamation, but in this case can at least be construed as following on from the English verse.

Although this is the second surviving manuscript of a poem constructed around this gratifyingly permutable theme, it is palaeographically very distinct from Bradshaw’s Carol 3, and is written in a later and much less formal hand (though with a higher grade script employed for the Latin burden). In fact, on grounds of date, script, and degree of formality, is much closer to Bradshaw’s Carol 4, similarly vernacular and similarly vulgar in tone. Moreover, unlike the formally written Carols 1-3, Bradshaw Carol 4 has been crossed through, and the Queens’ carol blotted out, by later, disapproving readers.¹³

Other inscriptions in this Naples Bible allow us to reconstruct something of the social and political milieu in which this carol was sung, and written down.¹⁴ One long, but aggressively inked-over note in the upper margin of the second leaf, has resisted even near infra-red imaging, but the name *popye*, a Norfolk family, remains legible.¹⁵ More helpful is an inscription in another sixteenth-century hand on the verso of the final text leaf, proudly stating the names of two other early owners, Dorothy Cowper, widow of William Cowper Esquire, and George Frevyle (Freville) (fol. 2z8v): *Iste liber p[er]tinet ad Georg[iu]m Freuyle m[?] iure dorothe uxoris sue et ante uxoris Will[ielm]i Cowper defuncti Ar[miger]i.*¹⁶ Lower down the page, in a very similar hand, is written: *xviii fote be a rodd of wood/and clx rodde make an acre. And xvi fote do be a rodde of londe pasture and medowe.* Though seemingly unrelated, these two notes witness to a set of inter-related contemporary concerns, and in turn reflect back on what may have become for some later audiences the “‘merie” anti-Catholicism’ of the carol.¹⁷

¹³ A note in another English hand of similar date, in blacker ink, added beneath the carol, reads: *tercio die octobris circa horam noctis nonam*, but it is unclear whether this is related to the occasion of singing or writing down the carol, or is entirely unrelated.

¹⁴ There is sporadic annotation in a number of English hands of the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century, mostly short, summary glosses, or numbers dividing chapters into sections; some have been trimmed when the book was rebound.

¹⁵ I am very grateful to my colleague Paola Ricciardi, Conservation Scientist at the Fitzwilliam Museum, for undertaking imaging in two spectral windows in the near-infrared region: 800-1000 nm and 1500-1700 nm. In both cases, the original and the over-written inks could not be distinguished from one another. X-ray fluorescence analysis revealed that they are both ferro-gallic inks; the only significant difference (which unfortunately does not influence the ink’s appearance in the near-infrared range) is the amount of zinc present in the inks.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Jacky Cox and Elisabeth Leedham-Green for advice about this inscription.

¹⁷ Formulation taken from Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 64.

William Cowper owned land in Lincolnshire and south Buckinghamshire, and was lord of the lesser of two manors at Boveney (a couple of miles further west along the Thames from Eton).¹⁸ At his death in 1544, he left to his widow Dorothy his mansion, two-thirds of the land and a farm at Boveney, as well as control during her lifetime of his properties in Lincolnshire.¹⁹ Five years later, Dorothy married the Cambridge lawyer George Freville (c. 1502-1579), and the following year, agreement was reached that the Boveney lands should be transferred to her new husband.²⁰ His ex-libris suggests that he was similarly keen to assert his lawful right (*iure*) to ownership of his wife's bible.

Freville was the second son of Robert Freville, of a family long established at Little Shelford near Cambridge. With only a small annuity at his disposal, Freville - like many of his contemporaries - carefully deployed his legal training, judicious marriage, and the strategic acquisition of land and patronage to advance and secure his position during the turbulent years of the mid-sixteenth century. Educated at Cambridge (possibly Peterhouse) and Barnards Inn, and a member of the Middle Temple (by 1553), his career was promoted by Sir William Paget (1505/6-1563), secretary to Henry VIII and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.²¹ Paget's patronage placed Freville as a JP for Cambridgeshire in 1539, as MP for Preston in 1547, as counsel to the Duchy of Lancaster in 1548, and Deputy High Steward of Cambridge University in 1549.²² According to Sir John Baker, Freville 'acted as legal advisor and steward to Peterhouse and other colleges', and in 1553 he was appointed Recorder of Cambridge. Hard-headed even about his own family's ancestral property, in 1556 he sold off the manor of Little Shelford, which his nephew had been forced to grant him with a reversion to himself. Along with other fellow lawyers, he was a trustee in Sir William Paget's will, tasked with managing his estates such that all Paget's debts should be paid. Paget signed and sealed his will on the 9 November 1560; a week later on 15 November, he transferred the manor of Parlaunt-Park (only about 6 miles to the west of Boveney) to Freville.²³ Under Elizabeth I, he was appointed a Baron of the Exchequer (3rd Baron, 1559, 2nd Baron, 1564), and soon after Dorothy's

¹⁸ 'Parishes: Burnham with Lower Boveney', in *A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 3*, ed. William Page (London, 1925), 165-184: *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/bucks/vol3/pp165-184> [accessed 20 June 2017].

¹⁹ London, The National Archives (henceforth TNA), PRO, PROB/11/30, fol. 32r.

²⁰ A.W. Franks, 'The genealogical history of the Freville family', *Cambridge Antiquarian Society Quarto Publications*, series 1, 14, (Cambridge, 1848), 28-29, where Dorothy is recorded in the pedigree ([31]) as having been buried at Shelford in 1568; an excellent summary of Freville's career can be found at: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/freville-george-1502-79>. According to footnote 321 of the source detailed in n.15, the transfer of land was recorded in the Feet of Fines for Buckinghamshire, Hilary 3 Edward VI: record at TNA, CP 25/2/55/396/3/4EDWVIHIL.

²¹ J. Venn and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922), Part I, vol. 2, 180; see also J. Bruce Williamson, *The Middle Temple Bench Book being a Register of the Middle Temple from the Earliest Records to the Present Time*, 2nd edn (London, 1937), 7, 72. For Paget see Sybil M. Jack, 'Paget, William, first Baron Paget (1505/6-1563)', *ODNB*, online edn, January 2008: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21121>, accessed 18 May 2017]; doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/21121.

²² R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, 2 vols. (London, 1953), I, 455.

²³ For Paget's last will and testament, proved 1 July 1563, see TNA, PRO, PROB 11/46, fols. 210r-211v, downloaded 18 May 2017. For the land transfer, see Feoffment of Manor of Parlaunt, messuage and tenement in Langley Marish, Lord William Paget to George Freville (Aylesbury, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, D 25/120).

death in 1568, he married another widow, Jane, the former wife of Edward Bankes, an Alderman of the City of London.²⁴

It is impossible to say whether Freville also penned the short note about the different values of the rod (or perch) as a unit for measuring woodland or pasture, but it fits squarely with his own territorial preoccupations and those of his class in the decades after the Dissolution. It draws on the new system of measurement proposed by the Augustinian canon Richard Benese (d. 1547) in his treatise *The maner of measuryng of all maner of lande, as well of woodlande, as of lande in the felde* (notably the chapter 'Of the maner of perches, the woodland perche, and the fylde lande perche'), first published in 1537. Benese's proposal for moving beyond the traditional and highly variable modes of measuring (such as ears of barley corn) to a standardized system answered exactly to the needs of the time; the Dissolution represented 'the largest transaction of landed property, stone, and glass in English history as the religious houses passed into the hands of the crown and its supporters'.²⁵ Equally, we do not know who was responsible for noting down the carol, but it could be argued that the comic literary tradition it embodies would have acquired a renewed and highly politicised topicality in the years of Henry VIII's reforms. The fostering of an intense anti-clericalism, and a focus on the 'moral shortcomings' of members of the religious orders, were fundamental to legitimising the seizure of Church property and assets.²⁶

Rossell Hope Robbins's observation that '[t]he two ribald carols suggest that more of this genre were current than the surviving few carols have hitherto indicated' is undoubtedly true.²⁷ And while Bradshaw's Carol 3 now exists in a kind of extra-historical limbo, this newly discovered 'merie songe' of the Friar and the Nun is tied through the owners of the bible in which it was recorded to a nexus of concerns – marital, legal, territorial – that structured the channels for personal and professional advancement at this period. We will never know, but is tempting to think that it might even have been sung at the wedding feast of the Widow and the Judge, Dorothy Cowper and George Freville.

²⁴ See J. H. Baker, 'Freville, George (d. 1579)', *ODNB*, online edn, May 2008: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10178>, accessed 17 May 2017 doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/10178. Freville is recorded as having undertaken considerable amounts of legal work (*laboribus immensis*) for Peterhouse in the 1540s, (T.A. Walker, *A Biographical Register of Peterhouse Men*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1927), I, 163), but there appears to be no record of him having matriculated there. He married for the second time on 7 October 1568, at St Pancras, Soper Lane, in the City of London, 'by lycence of the Archbyshope of Canterburie': W.B. Bannerman, *The Registers of St Mary le Bowe, Cheapside, All Hallows, Honey Lane, and of St Pancras, Soper Lane*, 2 vols., Harleian Society 44-45 (London, 1914-1915), II, 442. He appears to have died intestate.

²⁵ Quotation taken from J. Hughes, 'Benese, Richard of (d. 1547)', *ODNB*, online edn, January 2008: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2088>, accessed 15 June 2017; doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2088. Benese's work was first published by James Nicolson in Southwark, c. 1537; there were at least four subsequent sixteenth-century editions.

²⁶ On this context and the role of literary propaganda, see J. Robinson, *Court Politics, Culture and Literature in the Scotland and England, 1500-1540* (Aldershot, 2008), 141-52.

²⁷ Robbins, 'The Bradshaw Carols', 310.